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The Legend of Mount Manaslu

I could feel my heart pumping in my chest and the cold sweat pouring down my tired back as I lunged between the narrow corridors of the frozen cave. Close behind me I heard the thunderous booms of the yeti’s footstep’s echoing on the solid ground. Lifting my head to see my surroundings, I caught a faint glimpse of light slowly growing ahead of me. I was almost there! Using my last burst of energy, I sprinted faster than a speeding bullet out of the cave walls and into the shining sunlight. The safe haven of the tree line lay just ahead when… my shoe got caught on a hidden stick under the surface of the snow. I hit the ground abruptly, and my face burned as it hit the freezing and icy snow. Behind me I saw the Yeti relentlessly plowing out of the narrow passage towards my resting spot. As the realization of my impending doom hit me, I thought back to how this entire catastrophe began. It was just that morning when we arrived at the ski slope, ready to have a fantastic and memorable experience skiing the unforgivable slopes of the Himalayas.

It all began on a brisk October night three months before, when my roommates and I were gazing up at the star filled sky outside our college campus. We were walking back to our apartment, and the moon was shining down like a flickering candle on our perplexed faces as we talked about our dreams of skiing the Himalayas. Eric and I were both skillful skiers, and our other roommate Josh was a proficient snowboarder himself. “I’m still amazed that we saved up enough money for this trip. We still have to plan our departure date,” stated Josh. He was a fairly tall and well built guy, and he was by far the most athletic one in the group.

We arrived at our apartment, and Eric pulled out the small silver key. Eric was the quieter one in the group, and probably the smartest of the three. As he unlocked the door, he said, “How ‘bout January? I heard that’s the best time of the season in Nepal, and it won’t be very crowded.” Eric looked at me and continued talking. “What do you think, Andrew?”

“Sounds good to me,” I said, and so it was decided. We would leave on January 2nd, even though I was still very nervous about our entire Asian journey.

Despite my indecisive behavior, we got an international flight out of Newark Airport on January 2nd, and touched ground on the runway at Tribhuyan International Nepal Airport 20 hours later. We got a cab ride from the airport through a steep mountain pass to the hotel we would be staying at. I gazed out the window at the quickly passing trees and the distant mountains jutting out of the marshy farmland. The sky was turning pink as the sun slowly set behind the thick clouds, and I thought to myself, “Tomorrow I will be skiing those mountains, not only having the time of my life, but also putting my life on the line.”

As I stared out the smudged glass window to the blur of foliage moving by, I caught a glimpse of a dark, obscure object prowling in the woods. It was standing on its hind legs, and it seemed to be stalking in between the cluster of trees. In the blink of an eye the image was gone, and I was left with nothing more than a memory of that ominous figure.

“I leaned up to the Nepalese cabdriver named Sushant, a tall and skinny man in his mid thirties, and asked, “Are there bears in the area? Because I think I just saw one.”

Sushant turned towards me and said in a Nepalese accent, “No bears in this country now. In winter, bear hibernate in cave up mountain. Maybe you see bobcat”

“Maybe…,” I said in a flustered voice, “I’m sure that was a bear.” I looked back out the window to the shadows of the mountains that cast out over the vast and jagged land of Nepal.

Sushant switched on the radio and foreign voices echoed out of the muffled speakers. After a moment of silence, I saw our driver’s face grow tense, and he abruptly switched off the radio. Sushant said mournfully, “There was another avalanche… three more dead.”

“Where was the avalanche?” Josh asked. His voice revealed that even he was scared to go skiing with avalanche warnings across the country.

“Mostly in Lhotse region, not here,” said Sushant as we pulled into our destination. It was a long, two story cottage with rich Asian architecture and a high pointed roof so the snow didn’t get trapped up top. It was hard to tell exactly what the cottage looked like because there was a fresh blanket of snow piled up at least three feet around the base of the house.

Eric paid the cab bill, and we began our trek to the front door of the hotel. I stopped to look up through the trees to the peak of Mount Manaslu, where we would be skiing the following day. The snowcapped tip loomed over the valley below like a mountain lion ready to pounce on its prey. It protruded out of the darkening sky and had a frightening and jaw dropping effect.

“Hurry up, Andrew!” yelled Josh, who was entering the front door. I picked up my suitcase and climbed the steep set of stairs under the covered porch to the doorway. As we entered, a man who introduced himself as Mukti welcomed us and led us to our room. Mukti was a stout man with a long beard and dark, shadowed eyes set deep into his face. He had a limp and carried a cane, but he turned out to be a very kind and gentle man.

The door creaked open, and I groped around for the light switch until I felt my finger touch a knob. I flicked it on and revealed our small and quaint room with two small beds that stooped low to the ground. In between, there was a shallow cot for a third person to sleep on.

Soon we were all showered and unpacked with our clothes in the drawers. We went into the lobby area of the hotel, where Mukti and some other travelers were sitting by the smoldering fire, speaking in their foreign tongue. When we entered, they all welcomed us, and Mukti cleared a place for me to sit. We got familiar with each other and we all talked for most of the evening. As the fire grew dim, Mukti announced to us Americans, “Have any of you heard the legend of the Yeti?”

I was the first to respond, and I replied, “No, I’ve heard of the Yeti, but I’ve never been told the actual story.”

“It’s much more than just a story!” Mukti exclaimed, making me jump back in my seat. “The Yeti is real, and he dwells not far from here in an ancient cave. This cave is built into Mount Manaslu, nestled in the pine trees of the north face. Do not dare to enter the cursed realm of the Yeti, for if you do, I promise you will never leave Mount Manaslu again.” Mukti began to laugh, and he seemed to transform back to the kind old man who had welcomed us to his home. We all began to laugh with him, but I could tell by the look on my partner’s faces that they were all as frightened as I was.

Mukti stood up and announced, “Well, you should all be getting to bed now. You have a long day ahead of you, and you don’t want to be tired on the slopes!”

The next morning was quiet and peaceful. We woke to the sound of the wind rustling in the forest and the sun rays filtered by the trees shining into the window. After a quick breakfast, we got our skis in the rental car and started our journey. We drove up the mountain pass through the dense and ancient forest, and eventually saw the sign that read, “Manaslu Airport: sight-seeing, heli skiing, plane rides.”

We pulled into the driveway and parked next to the three other cars in the lot. We went into the main office and were greeted by a young woman who said she was the owner. “Three people for a heli skiing ride to the peak, please,” said Josh to the young woman, who smiled and told him how much it would cost.

We paid the bill and followed her to the runway, where there was a pilot waiting for us in the helicopter. He did not speak English, but he showed us a waver with safety tips and procedures for flying us the mountain. The blades began to spin, and I could feel the wind billowing into the seat as we lifted off above the Earth. The view was tremendous as we swerved in between the snow capped peaks and high mountain glades. I screamed over the sound of the noisy blades, “This view is amazing!” My partners nodded in agreement and looked back out at the picturesque sight.

It was high noon when we arrived at our final destination: the peak of Mount Manaslu. The sun was bright in the sky, and the reflection off the glistening snow made it difficult to look down at the wintery paradise.

The helicopter came to a stop, and it created a wind tunnel of snow as we came to a standstill on the icy ridge. The pilot turned around and showed us a map of how to reach the airport on our trip down the mountain. We exited the vehicle, and the pilot waved goodbye as he took off from his natural landing pad. We watched him fly away, and then as he dropped altitude into the valley, an eerie silence was cast over the group. We were alone, and had the entire north face of Mount Manaslu to ourselves. “Let’s get moving down the mountain!” announced Josh, and Eric and I both followed as he made the first track in the three feet of fresh snow blanketing the ground beneath. We were above the tree line, and I followed Josh into a large bowl in the mountain, where it was open terrain to ski anywhere you want. The snow glistened on my eyes and sprayed up onto my goggles as we traversed across the wide and open trail.

I saw Josh skid to a stop ahead of me, and I slowed down until I came to a halt by his side. “Where’s Eric?” Josh asked in a solemn and nervous voice.

I held my hand on my forehead to block the glaring rays of the sun. Looking up the mountain, I saw no signs of Eric. “I… I thought he was behind me the whole time,” I said, my voice faint and scared. “Eric! ERIC!” I screamed up the mountain. Josh joined in, but there was no reply other than the eerie echoes of our cries bouncing off the deep and empty chasms of the mountain.

We continued down the slope, hoping that Eric had passed us previously without us knowing. To our disappointment, there was no sign of Eric on that face of the mountain. We stopped on the side by the woods to rest and think about our situation. I was scanning the nearby trees for any sign of our friend, when I saw a large, dark figure hobbling in the opposite direction, making strange noises and stumbling often.

I pointed out this curious animal to Josh, who concluded that we should follow it and see where it takes us. Hoping for a clue to where our friend had gone, we took off our skis and trudged through the thick and heavy snow in the densely wooded glades.

After what seemed like hours of stalking this awkward and frightening figure, we saw a cave growing in the distance. As we got closer, we saw the animal disappear into the entrance, which was partially hidden by bushes and trees.

We continued through the dark and mysterious cave, stopping once in a while to listen for any unusual sounds. There were crude markings scratched into the smoke glazed walls of the blackened cave, which made us question the intelligence of this primitive creature. There was an orange glow in a section of the cave ahead, which gave us some way of telling direction. The narrow cave opened up into a large and spacious cavern, and in the middle of the cavern was a large fire. From the far end of the cavern we could hear a low and repetitive grunting. Josh opened his mouth and whispered, “Eric?”

From the other side of the cave there was a ferocious growl that echoed off the cave walls and vibrated the entire stone floor. I turned towards Josh, and together we spun around and lunged back into the narrow cave that we entered moments before. Dashing through the tight stone walls, my hand flailed to the side and scraped against the jagged rock. A sharp searing pain flowed through my arm, and I screamed in anguish as the blood dripped down my fingers.

At the opposite side of the passage, I heard the steady breath of Josh moving ahead of me towards the cave entrance. There were the booms of the animal’s footsteps coming from the cave behind me, and I knew that soon I would be nothing more than lunch. Spotting the light of the outdoors directly ahead of me, I used my last store of strength to burst out of the cave passage. Ahead of me, I saw Josh sprinting like a marathon runner towards the forest beyond. I was almost to the forest when I felt my foot catch on an underlying branch, making me fall flat on my face in the soft and icy snow.

I knew that my ultimate destruction was at hand when… I heard a rumbling from the slope above me. Looking up, I saw Eric sliding down the mountain on his skis, with a large pile of snow building in front of him. As he flew down the slope, the snow began to build and pick up speed. The rumbling increased, and soon there was a massive amount of snow billowing down the mountain at full speed. My pursuer began to run back to his home, but it was too late, because the avalanche had already swept him off his feet. He made a growling noise as he was completely immersed in snow, and was dragged down the mountain out of sight.

Eric skied down beside me and helped me up with his pole. Josh emerged from the forest, and bent down to dress my wounded arm. “That was brilliant!” I exclaimed to Josh, who smiled modestly and helped me start walking down the mountain. In the days that followed, we were praised and proclaimed as heroes by the local Nepalese people. Some people who didn’t believe in the Yeti never had faith in our stories, saying that we were just stupid foreigners looking for attention. Even though it was confirmed that the Yeti was deceased, we knew that the legend of Mount Manaslu would never die.